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KATHARINE TYNAN

A LITTLE BOOK
OF
XXIV CAROLS

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A LITTLE BOOK OF XXIV CAROLS





A LITTLE BOOK OF XXIV
CAROLS BY KATHARINE
TYNAN



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PROEM

“ADVENIAT REGNUM TUUM”

Thy kingdom come! Yea, bid it come.

*But when Thy kingdom first began
On earth, Thy kingdom was a home,
A child, a woman, and a man.*

*The child was in the midst thereof,
O, blessed Jesus, holiest One!
The centre and the fount of love
Mary and Joseph's little Son.*

*Wherever on the earth shall be
A child, a woman, and a man,
Imaging that sweet trinity
Wherewith Thy kingdom first began,*

*Establish there Thy kingdom! Yea,
And o'er that trinity of love
Send down, as in Thy appointed day,
The brooding spirit of Thy Dove!*

KATHARINE TYNAN.

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A LITTLE BOOK OF XXIV CAROLS





OUR LADY'S LULLABY



HE frost was white in the Winter
night,

The bitter snow came drifting
deep

Against her tender breast as white

His mother rocked Him. "*Baby sleep!
Lullaby loo! sleep sweet!*" sings she
Rocking her Baby on her knee.

The angels float on downy wings

Millions and millions flocking here.

Feathers are fine and gentle things

To bed a new-born Baby dear.

"*Why should it be, my Dear,*" she said.

"*That grass is all I have to spread?*"

He would not take the angels' down

Nor silk nor fur to wrap Him in

Nor woollens fine to put Him on

Nor new-spun linen, clear and thin.

"*My Babe's a-cold and naught,*" she saith,

"*To warm Him save the cattle's breath.*"

“Lullaby loo, my Baby Love.”

She swathes Him in the narrow bands.
Lord of the earth and Heaven above

And of the house not built by hands.

“Lullaby loo, my Babe,” she sighs.

“Whom hard-heart men cast out, despise!”

He would be born the poorest child

Was born on earth that wondrous night.

Only the cattle kind and mild

Beheld His starry Birth and bright.

“Lullaby” sings the mother still

“Sleep sweet, dear Child and fear no ill.”

The angels join the lullaby

The stars sing lullaby so low.

And all the Heaven's a wakeful eye

Watching an Infant's sleep below.

“Lullaby,” sings she, *“Baby small,*

“Who art my God, my King, my All.”

THE FIRST NOWELL

WAS the Heaven dark then,
Robbed of its light,
When little Jesus came to men
On a Christmas night?

Was it dark and dead?
Yea, lonesome to see,
All for the little golden head
That lay on Mary's knee.

Certes, Heavenly folk
Fled after Him, where
He lay amid the harmless flock
In the stable bare.

Certes, stars alike
Trooped from the sky,
And when he oped His lovely eyes
Sang Lullaby.

Certes, Heaven was dim,
Its lights all fled away,
Yea, Cherubim and Seraphim
Knelt in the hay.

Powers, Principalities,
Archangels in a band,
Before the Baby bent their knees
Kissing His hand.

That lay so small and soft,
New from His Mother's womb,
Since Heaven was in the cattle's croft
Heaven was in gloom.

AN OLD SONG RE-SUNG

I SAW three ships a-sailing,
A-sailing on the sea.
The first her masts were silver,
Her hull was ivory.
The snows came drifting softly,
And lined her white as wool ;
Oh, Jesus, Son of Mary,
Thy cradle beautiful !

I saw three ships a-sailing,
The next was red as blood.
Her decks shone like a ruby,
Encrimsoned all her wood.
Her main-mast stood up lonely,
A lonely Cross and stark.
Oh, Jesus, Son of Mary,
Bring all men to that ark !

I saw three ships a-sailing.
The third for cargo bore
The souls of men redeemed,
That shall be slaves no more.
The lost beloved faces,
I saw them glad and free.
Oh, Jesus, Son of Mary,
When wilt Thou come for me

THE CHRISTMAS BABE

ALL in the night when sleeping
I lay in slumber's chain,
The Christmas Babe came weeping
Outside my window-pane.
The Christmas Child whom faithless
Men turn from their hearthstone —
My dream was dumb and breathless,
The Christmas Babe made moan.

The small hands beat impatient
Upon my close-locked door.
The small hands they have fashioned
The world, the stars, and more.
He heard no sound of coming,
His cries broke wild and keen,
The Christmas Babe went roaming
For one to take Him in.

A burning bush of splendour
Enfolds the Christmas Child,
Like some meek bird and tender
In gold thorns undefiled.
I listen long to hear Him
Come crying at my door.
Voices of night I fear them,
And he comes by no more.

THE VIRGIN'S HEN

BELOW the stable eaves that saw
The blessed Baby laid in straw,
A little wren had built her nest.
She, honoured as the harmless beast,
Beheld the holy Birth with awe.

“Sweet, sweet!” she sang, and still “Sweet,
sweet!

O sweetest Babe from head to feet!
And sweet, sweet Mother!” To and fro
She fluttered; her small heart aglow
Enraptured her with holy heat.

“O happy I!” she said, “who stayed
When every Jenny Wren, afraid
At the first frost, fled to the South
I would I had the blackbird’s mouth
To praise this Babe and Mother-maid!

“I would I might strip off,” she said,
“Gold feathers from my breast and head,
Enough to warm and shield withal
This comfortless small Babe in stall,
And would my feathers were His bed!”

Then by the manger perched that bird
With "Gloria, gloria to the Lord!"
Who would have thought so small a throat
Had room for such a piercing note?
The singing stars and angels heard.

Therefore they call the little wren
Ever the Blessèd Mary's hen.
Therefore no boy shall cast a stone
When Jenny Wren, sitting her lone,
Sings how God came on earth for men.

Therefore her eggs be safe in tree
And all her merry brood go free.

ABOUT THE MIDDLE HOUR

ABOUT the middle hour of night
When Northern Streamers fly
Betwixt day-light and candle-light
Was heard the Babe's first cry.

The ass said to the ox : Brother,
Right honoured are we twain
Who house the Babe and Babe's Mother
Against the night and rain.

The ox him answered : Yea, brother,
Blessed our grass to yield
To bed the Lord and Lord's Mother
Who else hath lain afield.

O, what is fast and what is feast
Where such sweet fare is spread ?
The Baby at His Mother's breast,
With her dear milk is fed.

And now : Come kneel with me, brother,
This goodly sight to see !
Before the Child and Child's Mother
The twain have bent the knee.

And then : Come weep with me, brother,
For stony hearts of men.
For ruth of Babe and Babe's Mother
Their tears fell down like rain.

With streamers in the Northern skies,
While Bedlam slept in sin,
The Lord hath opened Paradise,
And bade the beasts come in.

THE CHRISTMAS BIRD

THE fold at midnight
Was light as the moon,
And in a tree a birdie bright
Sang still the gladdest tune.

With wings of gold sheen,
And gold head and hood,
He was the fairest bird, I ween,
That ever sang in wood.

He sang sweet and low
He sang loud and shrill ;
Above the stable in the snow,
The Star stood still.

The shepherd swains said then —
Each fell on his knee —
That was the very sweetest strain
Was ever sung in tree.

Are many birds in bower
With many a dulcet song ;
But none like him who sang that hour
The Christmas boughs among.

BETHLEHEM

WHERE man was all too marred with sin,
The ass, the ox were bidden in.

Where angels were unmeet to come
These humble entered Holydom.

Their innocent eyes and full of awe
Saw the fulfilment of the Law.

There in the stable with the beast
The Christmas Child hath spread His feast.

These gave their bed and eke their board
To be a cradle for their Lord.

Their honey-breath, their tears all mild,
Warmed in the cold the new-born Child.

These His adorers were before
The Kings and Shepherds thronged the door

And where no angels knelt there kneeled
The innocent creatures of the field.

O simple ones, much honourèd ;
He who oppresses you indeed,

Oppresses His kind hosts that lay
Once in the stable on the hay.

CHRISTMAS EVE

IT was the death-time of the year —
Sing, Gloria in Excelsis De !
How chill, how keen the stars appear !
The frost is on each grey grass-spear,
And frozen white are river and mere.

All human folk are houséd warm —
Sing, Gloria in Excelsis De !
With light and fire 'gainst night and storm.
And little children, safe from harm,
Each in its tender mother's arm.

Like the swan's plume the snows are spread —
Sing, Gloria in Excelsis De !
With Christ's dear mother lacking bed.
All doors are shut against her need,
Except the humble cattle-shed.

Shake down the grass for her to lie —
Sing, Gloria in Excelsis De !
And bid the quiet beasts draw nigh.
All Heaven shall now abase its eye,
Nor view the Birth so Heavenly.

Alone upon that holy ground —
Sing, Gloria in Excelsis De !
The ass and oxen knelt in swoond.
While Bedlam lay in slumber bound,
The ass, the ox, were worthy found.

Before the Kings and Shepherds these—
Sing, Gloria in Excelsis De !
And Powers and Principalities.
With ass and oxen on their knees,
He doth exalt all lowliness.

Oh, dull and sin-clogged hearts of men —
Sing, Gloria in Excelsis De !
With frost upon the window pane,
God save ye, merry gentlemen :
For Christ, Our Lord, is born again.

THE CHRISTMAS MIRACLE

ABOUT the middle of the night
When bells shake all the belfrys tall,
And pious folk by candle-light
Kneel at the Mass as by a stall.

The pious people's exaltation
Rises like incense in God's sight ;
He hath a simpler congregation
Out in the snow-drifts and the night.

Oh ! listen, listen, children dear,
Across the hill-side in the snow,
The ox inclines a patient fear,
The sheep are bleating soft and low.

For when the Christmas bells are pealing
They hear again the angels sing.
Oh see the simple beasts are kneeling
Once more to adore the Baby King !

So it hath happed to shepherd men,
More than to Kings from West and East,
To see the wondrous thing again,
The Adoration of the beast.

For them, so innocent and simple,
Again the Stable stars the night,
The Mother covers with her wimple
The new-born Babe from frost and blight.

At midnight on the Christmas Eve
The beasts kneel down in stall and byre,
And shake once more the hay to receive
The Heaven's Desire, the Earth's Desire.

A SONG OF DECEMBER

WHEN Robin sings on a bare thorn
The Baby King of the world is born.

When snow is on the bush and briar
And all the folk are housèd warm ;
When beasts are gathered to the byre
Safe from the winter night and storm :

Then in the deepest gloom of all
God's Son lies in the cattle's stall.

When snow is on the field and hill
And every bird is cold in nest,
And dumb and frozen every rill,
And Robin sings with a puffed breast :

In the mid-winter the world's Rose,
Our Lord, is wrapped in swaddling-clothes.

When shepherds watch their silly sheep
Lest that some wandering one be lost ;
When all the chilly drifts are deep
And the white world is in the frost :

With stars all keen and wind in the East
His Mother gives Him of her breast.

When the first lambs are laid in fold,
And every grass-blade's grown a spear,
When children cluster from the cold
Around the nursery hearth-fire clear :

About the hour of bitterest dearth
The Lamb of God is born on earth.

Now in the bitter winter weather
The ass, the ox, they give Him bed.
The stars and angels sing together
And Heaven is in the cattle-shed.

The ass, the ox, they kneel to adore
The Hope the world long waited for.

The ass, the ox, are hosts to Him,
Since all the inns are full to-night,
With seraphim and cherubim
All kneeling in the starlight white.

Noel ! Noel ! Our Lord is born
When Robin sings on a bare thorn.

THE WEEPING BABE

SHE kneels by the cradle
Where Jesus doth lie ;
Singing, " Lullaby, my Baby !
But why dost Thou cry ?

"The babes of the village
Smile sweetly in sleep ;
And lullaby, my Baby,
That ever dost weep !

"I've wrapped Thee in linen,
The gift of the Kings ;
And wool, soft and fleecy,
The kind Shepherd brings.

"There's a dove on the trellis,
And wings in the door,
And the gold shoes of angels
Are bright on our floor.

"Then lullaby, my Baby !
I've fed Thee with milk,
And wrapped Thee in kisses
As soft as the silk.

“And here are red roses,
And grapes from the vine,
And a lamb trotting softly,
Thy playfellow fine.

“Wake up, little Jesus,
Whom naught can defile;
All gifts will I give Thee
An Thou wilt but smile.

“But it’s lullaby, my Baby!
And mournful am I,
Thou cherished little Jesus,
That still Thou wilt cry.”

SINGING STARS

“WHAT sawest thou, Orion, thou hunter
of the star-lands,
On that night star-sown and azure when thou
cam’st in splendour sweeping,
And amid thy starry brethren from the near
lands and the far lands
All the night above a stable on the earth thy
watch wert keeping?”

“Oh, I saw the stable surely, and the young
Child and the Mother,
And the placid beasts still gazing with their
mild eyes full of loving.
And I saw the trembling radiance of the Star,
my lordliest brother,
Light the earth and all the heavens as he kept
his guard unmoving.

“There were kings that came from Eastward
with their ivory, spice, and sendal,
With gold fillets in their dark hair, and gold
broidered robes and stately,

And the shepherds gazing star-ward, over yonder hill did wend all,
And the silly sheep went meekly, and the wise dog marvelled greatly.

“Oh, we knew, we stars, the stable held our King, His glory shaded,
That His baby hands were poising all the spheres and constellations ;
Berenice shook her hair down, like a shower of star-dust braided,
And Arcturus, pale as silver, bent his brows in adorations.

“The stars sang altogether, sang their love-songs with the angels,
With the Cherubim and Seraphim their shrilly trumpets blended.
They have never sung together since that night of great evangels,
And the young Child in the manger, and the time of bondage ended.”

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CHRISTMAS COMMUNION

COME in, dear Babe, and rest !
Cold is the night and keen ;
Here is no Mother with her milky breast,
Her long hair's silken screen,
To hide from Thee the stable, poor and mean.

There are no angel-folk
Hung between Heaven and earth,
Making the night a glory, and no flock
Of stars that sing for mirth
Because of the wonderful, long-looked for Birth.

It is so dark and cold,
Colder than Bethlehem was ;
Here are no sheets with lavender in fold,
Nor even the pleachèd grass.
Cold as a stone, cold is my heart, alas !

But two gaunt beasts are here,
Not meet for Thy delight ;
Ox of my appetites misspent and drear,
Ass of my folly light,
Hanging their heads, Thy courtiers are to-night.

Not like those innocent things
That shook the bed for Thee,
Here are no shepherd men, here are no
kings
With gifts in their degree ;
Cold, bare, and empty, yet wilt come to me ?

Cold as the clay and hard,
Yet wilt Thou come as of yore ?
I who have neither gold nor spikenard,
Thou Hope as long before !
For Thee, for Thee, the stable waits once more.

VOTIVE OFFERING

HEARTS of silver and of gold
Men had brought in days of old
To Thy shrine for offering,
Symbols of a holier thing.

Lord, Lord, dear, adored !
Take my little candle, Lord ;
Through the lights in Paradise
Let my candle please Thine eyes.

Hearts that ache and hearts that break,
Hearts to shatter and remake,
Here before Thy feet are laid,
Where June's roses burn and fade.

Lord, Lord, life is light,
Flame a heart that burns to white ;
As this flame mounts steadily,
Draw a heart that turns from Thee.

For a cold heart all its days,
Let my candle tell Thy praise ;
For a heart that's ignorant,
Let my candle one hour chant.

Poor my candle is and small,
Yet Thou know'st the thoughts of all :
How my candle saith my prayer
When my feet go elsewhere, —

How one thought I leave behind,
Though my thoughts are hard to bind ;
Though I go away, forget,
Thou one hour o'erlookest it.

ROSA SPINOSA

SEVEN sad swords had Mary's heart,
Seven sad wounds to ache and smart ;
That young rose, her Baby, blowing,
Put forth thorns for her undoing :
Thorns to pierce the milky breast
Where He grew and took His rest.

O my rose of joy and grief,
Set with thorns in stem and leaf,
As her heart was piercèd thorough,
So my heart with love and sorrow.
Little rose of thorns, come close
To the heart you stab so, Rose !

MATERNITY

HER body, sweet to be his food,
Yields him his precious milk and good.
No body of death but life, see then
The sacred body of Motherhood !

Her heart, by one sweet guest renewed,
Hath room for all earth's hapless brood.
Yea, wounds for all earth's hurt children,
The broken heart of Motherhood !

OF AN ANGEL

NEVER alone upon my way ;
Mine Angel's with me every day :
And all night long he sits and sings,
Shaking the darkness off his wings.

The wavering moonlight steals and slips
From amber head to pinion tips,
Bathing him in a silver sea
That makes his eyes a mystery.

When I am bruised and sad and sore,
Have I not felt him leaning o'er,
Kissing the heavy lids to sleep ?
Yes, I have heard him weep and weep.

In the noon-sun I see him stand,
Rosy azaleas in his hand,
His sapphire gown, his aureoled curl,
His opal wings and mother-o'-pearl.

And while this angel walks with me
I fear not all the ill I see,
Though in the fruit a canker grows,
And serpents harbour 'neath the rose.

In noon-day gold, in moonlight snow,
I know the precious things I know,
Hidden not from my love-keen sight
By dazzle of day and mirk of night.

Mine Angel's praying hands and meek,
The pure young outline of his cheek,
His grave young mouth, his brow like snow,
His everlasting eyes I know.

Love lights his tapers at those eyes,
O, stainless Bird of Paradise !
Love in your heart to Love divine
Has built a temple and a shrine.

O lips that bless, and eyes that yearn,
And sometimes sad, but never stern,
Dearest, my friend, my gift of God,
Companion on my dangerous road,

Stay with me, though the day be long,
And heaven is lonelier for your song ;
Though I be sad, and all my plea
Is only my sad poverty.

EASTER

BRING flowers to strew His way,
Yea, sing, make holiday;
Bid young lambs leap,
And earth laugh after sleep.

For now He cometh forth
Winter flies to the north,
Folds wings and cries
Amid the bergs and ice.

Bring no sad palms like those
That led Him to His foes,
Bring wind-flower, daffodil,
From many a vernal hill.

Let there be naught but bloom
To light Him from the tomb
Who late hath slain
Death, and his glory ta'en.

Yea, Death, great Death is dead,
And Life reigns in his stead;
Cometh the Athlete
New from dead Death's defeat.

Cometh the Wrestler,
But Death he makes no stir,
Utterly spent and done,
And all his kingdom gone.

Bring flowers, make holiday,
In His triumphal way.
Salve ye with kisses
His hurts that make your blisses.

Bring flowers, make holiday,
For His triumphal way :
Yea, fling before Him
Hearts of men that adore Him.

SHEEP AND LAMBS

ALL in the April evening,
April airs were abroad,
The sheep with their little lambs
Passed me by on the road.

The sheep with their little lambs
Passed me by on the road ;
All in the April evening
I thought on the Lamb of God.

The lambs were weary, and crying
With a weak, human cry.
I thought on the Lamb of God
Going meekly to die.

Up in the blue, blue mountains
Dewy pastures are sweet ;
Rest for the little bodies,
Rest for the little feet.

But for the Lamb of God,
Up on the hill-top green,
Only a Cross of shame
Two stark crosses between.

All in the April evening,
April airs were abroad ;
I saw the sheep with their lambs,
And thought on the Lamb of God.

LAMBS

HE sleeps as a lamb sleeps,
Beside his mother.
Somewhere in yon blue deeps
His tender brother
Sleeps like a lamb and leaps.

He feeds as a lamb might,
Beside his mother.
Somewhere in fields of light
A lamb, his brother,
Feeds, and is clothed in white.

HOLY INNOCENTS

GOLD on gold, snow on snow,
Height on height, row on row ;
Greater in number these
Than the sands of the seas.

Yea, past all counting far,
Flower on flower, star on star,
Dimpled shoulder, cheek of peach,
As they lean each to each.

Golden heads, brows of pearl,
O many a boy and girl,
O many a girl and boy,
Mother's grief, mother's joy.

But amid snow and gold,
Gathered warm from the cold,
Fairer than gold, more fine,
Should be two that are mine.

GOD'S BIRD

NAY, not Thine eagle, Lord.—
No golden eagle I,
That creep half-fainting on the sward
And have not wings to fly.

Nor yet Thy swallow dear,
That, faring home to Thee,
Looks on the storm and hath no fear
And broods above the sea.

Nor yet Thy tender dove,
Meek as Thyself, Thou Lamb!
I would I were the dove, Thy love,
And not that thing I am!

But take me in Thy hand
To be Thy sparrow, then;
Were two sparrows in Holy Land,
One farthing bought the twain.

Make me Thy sparrow, then,
That trembles in Thy hold;
And who shall pluck me out again
And cast me in the cold?

But if I fail at last,
A thing of little price,
If Thou one thought on me hast cast
Lo, then my Paradise!

LOVE IN HEAVEN

THE child is rocked on Mary's knees,
Her lullaby stills his alarms,
Love's cradle gives him happy ease,
Love's nest of love within her arms :
"Lullaby," she singeth, "pretty babe of sorrow,
Thy mother comes to stay with thee to-morrow."

One angel holds his basin, one
His ewer of golden water sweet,
And one his robe to put him on,
And one his pillow and his sheet.
"O mystery," they cry, "of love and sorrow,
Sleep sweet, dear babe, thy mother comes
to-morrow."

Immortal angels standing by,
Kiss that sweet babe on Mary's knee.
"Blessed the woman is," they sigh,
"Whose motherhood hath given her thee.
Happy her lot in mortal joy and sorrow
Who lost thee yesterday but finds to-morrow."



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